



## PAPER BOATS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

On the Sand-Dune

Mr. Venkataramani is a man of refinement of sentiment, of lofty ideals and immensely sincere. He is an artist within his *genre* the interpretation of his own people.

—*The New Pearson's, New York.*

# PAPER BOATS



BY

K. S. VENKATARAMANI

*(Second Edition)*

GANESH & Co., MADRAS

1925





TO

MY FATHER SIDHANATHA

AND MY FIRST-BORN RAMAMURTI

NEITHER OF WHOM LIVED

TO SEE ME FLOAT MY PAPER BOATS



## PREFACE

THREE of these Essays were originally published in *East and West* in more or less the present form. "The Indian Beggar" appeared in September, 1913, "On Fishermen" in February, 1913, "The Hindu Temple" in February, 1914. I sent a reprint of "The Hindu Temple" to Mr. A. C. Benson, who promptly replied to me as follows, on March 2nd, 1914:

"I have received your paper on the Hindu Temple and have read it with very real and lively interest. It throws a perfectly new light upon the whole question, and I am very grateful to you for bringing it before me in so picturesque and impressive a form. I cannot help feeling that

a number of similar sketches on Indian Life and Customs would be of great service to us here in England."

This generous letter awakened in me the dream of authorship. I have been moved ever since with the joy. The Great War broke out in August, 1914, and Mr. A. C. Benson again, in one of his letters, dated April 11th, 1918, advised me to "defer publication until affairs are more settled". This delayed the launching of my PAPER BOATS till the present day.

I take this opportunity to mention the name of Professor K. Sundaraman, whose Love has chastened my interest in Life and Letters; and of Mr. N. Raghunathan, who cheered me with the intimate and critical comradeship of a decade.

I am specially indebted also to Messrs. T. L. Crombie and F. Kunz for many valuable suggestions. If ever my PAPER BOATS reach distant

ports, I owe it to their captaincy. The cargo is mine, mostly of strange and fragile flowers, but the difficult navigation is theirs of this floater without sail or ballast.

K. S. VENKATARAMANI

Mylapore, Madras

May 11, 1921

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND  
EDITION

Edges-trimmed, I float again my PAPER  
BOATS.

BRINDABAN STREET

Mylapore, Madras

April 20, 1925

K. S. V.

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## FOREWORD

IT is not often that I feel as airily sure of finding a smiling "thank you," as now when I set afloat this really delightful fleet of "Paper Boats". It tells of the life of "my village". After a dissertation on Indian "valiant beggars," the Fisherman comes ashore, and we play cricket, and go to the temple, and meet a charming Pariah boy, and a Hindū pilgrim, and "my grandmother," a typical queen of the home, despotic and wholly lovable, "my neighbour," once a Sub-Registrar of Assurances, and finally the Jagath Guru—with the intrusive, unnecessary "h" which reminds one that one is in Tamil land.

The booklet makes us live in the village, and share in its life. The



writer is a complete master of English, simple, dainty, with a sense of humour, steeped in the sweetness of affection, running through the living descriptions. I trust it will find many readers, who will like it as much as I do.

May 9, 1921

ANNIE BESANT

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## THE INDIAN BEGGAR

THE Indian Beggar is the most interesting of the world's ragged men. Of all the numerous progeny of poverty, he is the eldest born. Thus entitled to the virtue of the good law of *primogeniture*, he has inherited the vast estate of the world's wretchedness. He is a wayward and wandering fellow. He is a melancholy being. He trembles like a tear-drop on the lotus-leaf of life. But he would dance with rainbow joy, if but touched with the sunbeam of a silver coin. He is a vivacious creature, keenly alive to the sensational properties of sunshine, to the sound of a transferable piece of copper. His is the most absorbing of vocations. Never resting, ever hoping, he is nothing but

## PAPER BOATS

for his faith and resourcefulness—even in the darkest hour. His virtues are ever fugitive. Yet he is the first in the roll of the Recording Angel.

The recognised Indian beggar is always a valiant beggar. The truly disabled, who have of necessity to beg for their existence, are only a dying minority, ill-equipped for the combat. The valiant beggar is the ornament of the profession, the aristocrat of the race. He lords it over his puny and crippled brethren. He is first and foremost a gentleman. He insists on an engaging, at any rate an unmaimed personality, as the criterion of fitness for any profession, especially for begging, where people are apt to forget one's presence. He has learnt from the Bhagavad-Gita the dignity of labour and he is the most detached worker. Hence he is a hard fighter and sincerely believes in the battle of life, where laurels are not to be won with crutches or wooden legs. He is outspoken in

his several ways. Each way is a delightful study in the fine art of begging.

*The Beggar with the Bowl.*—His is the most ancient and least expensive form of begging. He has numerous compeers and learned colleagues, who have made the profession a trifle congested and decent living considerably precarious—the fate of all liberal professions. His skill in begging is of a varied and interesting character. He has nothing to recommend him except his own fine physique. A pertinacious humility and cunning cajoling are two of his traditional methods to enlist the sympathy of the reluctant householder. He trusts to his lungs to engage attention, and his vociferative power is at times the envy of orators. But a clever fellow harmonises his incoherent appeals for charity into a prose-poem of tolerable melody, composed on the principle of a work-a-day metre. He is eloquently appreciative of the virtues of the passer-by, and trusts

for a pie or two as a reciprocal courtesy. For sheer industry and patience, even under distinctly discouraging circumstances, he is surely unmatched.

He is of an emaciated appearance. He often lives on the verge of starvation. His cares, by their very chronic character, have almost passed off into a tranquil ease. He seldom turns out a rogue or a thief. He is generally a bachelor—after all, valiant beggars are some of the finest specimens of single blessedness. He does his cooking himself and lives all alone under the shade of big Banyan trees on the outskirts of the village. He has few relations to fall back upon, and his birth is often obscure. He is an orphan—even from the cradle.

*The Beggar with the Monkey and the Dog.*—He is the most popular fellow. He is truly the demagogue of the polity of beggars. He is an expert at playing to the gallery. He

tickles its emotions and makes the best use of the human love of sensation. He knows the quarter to which to appeal for a lucrative, at any rate an easy living. He enslaves children, who go into ecstasies over his honoured arrival in a village, and fetch out their fathers. He touches their pockets through the children. His method is infallible. He collects a crowd and delights the audience with his antics. He is generally a family man, with wife—sometimes wives—and children. He weds any stray girl as fancy approves or as pleasure dictates. He dissolves the marriage tie by the very simple method of desertion—on a dark night.

His two animals are the monkey and the dog. The former is well-dressed and adorned with tinsel. The latter serves as a horse to the former, as the monkey is a splendid equestrian. Little children cry out for joy



when the dog and the monkey indulge in a homely fight at the bidding of their master.

Though the beggar with the monkey earns the most, he does not save much. He is an adept at kidnapping and is up to any deed for money. Waylaying solitary men gives him a delightful change of vocation and a proper outlet for his potential valour. He heaves only a sigh of relief when put in prison. The predatory and nomadic instincts are ever rampant wherever he may be, whether in a village or in a city, and he is very fond of an exodus at least once in five years, the viceregal term of office.

*The Beggar with the Snake.*—He is an extremely grim fellow. His grimness is surpassed only by his industrious pertinacity. He is a Korava by caste, and he announces his arrival at a house by a prolonged labial

respiration—"bir, bir-r"—the *r* recurring with infinite pathos and passion. He has a deep, hoarse voice with a guttural emphasis in his address. He never goes out of a house empty-handed. Even a pie is welcomed, though not without a grunt. He never believes that the game is not worth the candle. His snake is a half-dead thing. He handles the slimy creature with perfect unconcern. The Cobra is the variety generally exhibited. It dances to the music of his *magadi*—the snake-charmer's pipe. Even if he is married, he is without children. People attribute this sterility to a curse of Adisesha—the Lord of Serpents—who has inflicted this punishment on all those who imprison or molest his dear progeny.

Misery is truly writ large in the face of the beggar with the snake. He is grim and gruesome to look at. His wrinkles seem endless. He knows

not a day of joy. He does not betray even the evanescent vivacity of his brethren when a pie is put in his hands. His is a life of perpetual gloom, suggestive of mysterious wanderings in the night. He has dropped the pearl of his soul into a perennial stream of tears. Though prosperous for a beggar he is unhappy to a pathetic degree. He is proud, reflective and indignant. The iron has entered into his soul, and it now gleams out of his eyes.

*The Gypsy Beggar.*—He is an erratic segment of a not altogether flawless circle. He is the prophet of the race, but little honoured in his own land. He would even be peacefully stoned to death, but for his sartorial excellences, which are flint-proof. He is ever an unwelcome interloper in the hierarchy of beggars. His habits are exotic, his tastes alien, his talents and methods are voted

altogether as dishonourable. His origin is obscure, and he is believed to be a happy Scythian emigrant. Still, there is reason to suppose that he is of indigenous growth. Probably he is the fruition of the castaways of generations. His history is what his memory can remember, his traditions what the exigencies of a nomadic life permit. He lives in supreme self-contentment, with little reverence for the past and much faith in the present and great indifference for the future.

The gypsy beggar is the lay extempore astrologer of Hindu society. He believes more in his own cleverness than in the possibility of distant planets exerting any influence over our destinies. So all his glib predictions are cunningly coined phrases of certain universal currency, got out of a memory which is a rich storehouse of such jewelled wampums. He is a very clever and amiable student of human

nature, remarkable for his intuitive powers. He can feel your thought-pulses ten beats in advance. He is a keen observer of men and things. He is well-versed in the weaknesses of human feeling. He is all sagacity when he is charting, in rotund phrases of mellow felicity, the immediate future of a "pumpkin-bellied" landlord in whose house he has generously posted himself. He is a sweet talker, a consummate master of honeyed words, so long as there is a chance for alms. If he be repulsed, hard fighter as he is, he reverses his rosy predictions, and curses with the solemnity of an injured sage; for this he is sometimes well paid in ringing knocks and blows. Still in adversity, the advertising energy of his little drum which beats the eternal *kudu, kudu*, which means in Tamil "give, give," is immense. He is the most resourceful of the begging clans of India. He plays also

the rôle of a palmist, and makes innocent children and unlucky men victims to his quackery. But he knows and truly appreciates the knowledge that the primary value of the palm is in its being a necessary and useful adjunct to the mouth. He is quite a clever and a cunning fellow in his professional habits and tricks, in the rare versatility of his begging talents.

*The Beggar with the Bull.*—He is very nearly a cousin of the gypsy beggar, but more royal in his methods of begging. His bull lends him an air of dignity. He has a keen partiality for old clothes. Rags have almost received a touch of divinity at his hands. But there is surely a motive behind. Rags are of greater value than anything he could hope to get as alms in silver or paddy. The bull is trained to do tricks to the accompaniment of a jarring frictional note on a drum of fair size. The bull is d

many colours, and it struts about evidently in conscious admiration of the value of clothes even for the animal kingdom. Its intelligence and training are generally very much appreciated. The bull can salute and say "good morning" with faultless phonetic accuracy, phonetics as understood best in the realm of cattle—a grunt which means many things. Of a considerable number of questions, it can single out easily, "Do you want old clothes?" and give a hilarious reply in the affirmative by its nod of assent, so gracious and gentle.

The beggar with the bull is a trifle precarious in his habits. He is fond of liquor. God has touched his fingers with the deftness and celerity of a sewing machine. He plies the needle, mends the rags collected in the morning and converts them into coin which procures for him the nectar of his life, toddy or arrack.

But he is the most jolly fellow in the beggars' polity. He is cheerful and indifferent. He disdains to care for the morrow or look prudently into the ethics or the economics of his profession. He lives only for the day and for the cup that sweetens the many tears of life ere he too into the dust descends.

*The Musical Mendicant.*—Though it is music, it is not all sunshine for him. His is an Ariel life of song, and this is the only consolation. His is no life of milk and honey. He tunes his solitary string or parched vocal chord into a never-ending chorus of praise, but it is all a praise which pays ill the strenuous courtier. In the early hours of the morn, he wends his way, treading but softly the harsh flint of earth like an angel gone astray. Breaking forth from the village corner, the exquisite tenderness of his voice has something of the fugitive splendour of the dawn. The lowering



cloud nourishes the lightning in its bosom. The storm of his pathless life nourishes also the rainbow joy of full-throated song. Girls in the street play "hide and seek" in merry rounds of laughter, and my musical mendicant fills the ear with string-born melody of purest rapture.

This nimble, wandering musician is the best-treated of Indian valiant beggars. He is the least unwelcome of alms-men. But his cousins in the profession look upon his music as witchcraft, for he has forsaken the plain language of charity for the secret charms and symbols of a magical incantation. Nevertheless he is the simplest fellow, with his own immortal longings—of the stomach. He is an unremitting exponent of his gifts. What though he carol in vain his sweetness like a lonely bird? The wind that blows along the wild bamboos breaks into a thousand songs; the rills that

flow from rock to rock fill the air with falls of music; all in vain, as much in vain.

The musical mendicant is ever bursting with a message at the threshold of any decent householder, even as the monsoon cloud cannot but descend as fertilising rain. It is either a ballad from folk-lore or a devotional offering in praise of the Almighty, or if the pretty almsgiving hands kindle him, a love-song in the sweetest metre. The ideal musical beggar is either a boy or, even better, a girl just breaking into adolescence. The ripening voice in the travail of song is an enchantment in the air. It is the breath of youth and hunger playing on the lyre of life—for a handful of rice in regulated parsimony, or a few copper coins!

My musical mendicant is not a cooking animal. It ill suits his vocation. It chokes the stream of music.

The soot of the kitchen fire blackens the throat of the warbling bird. Fire and fine arts go ill together. He cherishes this philosophy in secret adoration. But the truth of the matter is that his hunger, like his music, is so lyrical that it would brook no delay. O Hunger, he will never cease to adore you, never end his song celestial in praise of you, the serpentine charms of your power. The more he bends under you, sadder, sweeter plays the finger on the harp and divinely calm and tender is the voice. Cassia smells the sweeter for being crushed. Ah! What matters it to him if the sweetness melts into thin air, even as Ariel's song.

*The Nocturnal Beggar.*—Like the members of the feline race, the nocturnal beggar sallies forth after sunset in quest of prey. The voice of charity trembles in the throes of hunger. The eyes twinkle with hope

for the generous light of humanity, even as the star-lit void. The night but seems the darker. And the obdurate appeals of the nightly beggar disturb for a while the retiring buzz of street life. He is the last line in the scroll ere another day dies.

He is more fastidious than even the musical mendicant in the matter of alms. He accepts nothing but prepared food, which he eats all alone without toil and without pleasure. Like all vocations in the night, his is a remunerative business. For his is a mendicancy which goes deeper to the heart, and seldom is the Hindu home unresponsive to the shrill cry of nocturnal charity. Alms we would repulse in broad daylight, but never in the deepening shades of the evening; and more strongly in the calm of night flits the thought: "Who knows whether we may live yet another day to mend our soul. Sleep may be death."

The nocturnal beggar, like great men, is always born. None other, not even the most valiant, would exchange the birthright of day mendicancy for the more lucrative and easier job of the beggar in the night, for he is the lowest in the scale, and the unrelenting Law of Karma assigns him a mode of living with which Hindu Society would not interfere and which he accepts with cheerful resignation.

The evening star shines in clear lustre. The toil is over and the village heaves in peaceful slumber. We hear the dying echoes of the retracing steps of the solitary figure. In and out he goes from the maze of village lanes. Far away on the outskirts, the big banyan tree edges on the mountain stream. To this hermitage, almost at dead of night, returns my beggar, to stretch forth his body in the quickening hour of peace and forget the pain of life in the dream of sleep.

Begging, as a profession, has a great educative value. I have the greatest respect for the professional beggar. Though its ethics may chagrin chicken-hearted economists, valiant begging is the very fountain-head of all our manly virtues. It thaws the heart and sets free the genial current of the soul. It is a stimulus to the heart. It is a tonic to weak emotions. It nurtures generous impulses. It is the custodian of kind and gentle thoughts. It humanises man. It is the whetstone of the human heart and its touchstone as well. Our feelings would lose all their elasticity and graciousness, if they were not ever kept awake by the artillery of eloquent appeals. If valiant begging disappear from our society, a picturesque side of human nature would be blotted out by unkind hands, and a poetic pendant of society broken off by the prose of economic pedantry. The liberated souls of the great

apostles of Love all over the world are born again as valiant beggars. For where is the teacher who is not anxious to test the effect of his lessons?

In India, valiant begging has ever been a tender plant, nurtured with great and loving care. The stream of charity has ever strengthened its roots. The seven classes are its seven fragrant blossoms. Just now the plant is running its period of fruitful maturity. Surely posterity will take as much toil as the generation of to-day, to nurture this tender plant and shield it from foul weather—the murderous attacks of dull, prosy, social legislators.

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## ON FISHERMEN

FISHING is a very ancient occupation. Even Noah's ark should have felt itself doubly blessed for a present of the hook and the rod. No wonder, then, that the Tamils, who claim, in support of their being the first-born, the earliest textbook on grammar, are also the most ancient anglers. My angler is known in Tamil as a *Sembadavan*. But he is greater than his English compeer. For fishing is ingrained in the Dravidian blood by centuries of vigilant exercise of the rod. My *Sembadavan* is a fisherman by the sovereign right of birth, with the irrevocable legacy of a sure rod and a wide ocean. He hates the mockery of a dilettante who makes it a



pastime of idle hours. The conservative instincts of tradition tell him that fishing is a science, no less perilous or exacting than war, never mastered in parades and sham fights, in leisurely and regulated fits of valour. My *sembadavan* has the vision splendid. By fishing, he always means ocean-fishing. His soul is as restless as the sea. For fresh water and such puny speculations he has nothing but contempt. He dives for pearls, and knows that oysters are never found in fresh or shallow water.

The *sembadavan* forms a caste by himself. He is one of the obscure tribal minorities of the vast Indian Nation. He is a fragmentary record which indicates the quietude and charm of a complex national life in its recesses and by-ways, in its more original moods. He is indeed but one of the gentle shallows which ever eddy in magic circles on the fringe of the

swift-flowing stream of national life. But Hinduism neglects this innocent and charming set of people. These wonderful toilers on the sea represent on land the last rung in the social ladder. Once stranded on earth, their virtues become powerless. Yet, as the conquerors of one of the primal elements of Nature, they gladly wait for the day of the reassessment of the values of life, even in Hindu Society. For anything I know, the day may not be far off. He who scans the horizon reads the gathering tendencies. Who will then willingly deny due merit to a caste on which is to be based much of the future history of Hindu naval heroism?

But now one should not peep too far into the future. For the present, the fishermen are an industrious set of people. They have something of the bee or, better, the bee-hive in them. They are a gregarious lot of happy

bipeds, or, if you please, beings made in the image of God. The sea and the shore are still the Alpha and the Omega of their existence. There is now perhaps no caste or community in India that is more under the influence of old-world ideas. European civilisation, has as yet made little or no mark on these humble men who still hold fast to their ancient moorings. Hindu conservatism is epical in quality and deep-rooted in foundation, and hence its preservative power is immense. Every billow of reform, agitated at great cost by great talents, has seen this interesting creature on the same *catamaran*, on the same planks of wood, maintaining with admirable calmness and dexterity the even tenor of his life. Civilisation conveys to him no evolutionary significance, but presents him only with a stationary aspect. Changing environment affects his life no more than a stormy sea

does his perilous vocation. He has slipped the pearl of his soul into the bottomless brine.

Even the affluent among the fishermen still live in primitive style in thatched huts on the sea-shore. The censorial authority of the aristocrats of the village effectively checks any lurking partiality for well-built houses of brick and mortar. The simplicity of a fisherman's life is remarkable to a degree. He goes to his work very early in the morning and toils in the sea till sunset with unequal fortune every day, and returns at dusk to partake of the meagre comforts of his home. In the worst of troubles he is never given to whining. He grasps the cold hand of penury, if he has to, with a courage and resignation that would do credit even to a more cultured being. He ends as he begins, without a sigh.

As for the fisherman's wife, she is a water-nymph, but one who would,

like the seaweed, grow even on sand-dunes. She is virtuous in wedlock, one-pointed in devotion to her lord, who is out of sight or sound, in the grand sea in the midst of breakers. She is even more virtuous as a mother, for the paternal care as well as the maternal is hers. Her husband is merely the bread-winner. She is naturally the more important personage. She does practically everything while her lord is away at sea. She goes to the market and does the purchasing as well as the selling. She collects fuel for the kitchen fire, washes the clothes, tends her cattle, and trains her children. She is an expert pedestrian, and is generally shrewder than her lord in dealing with so cunning a world as ours. She has the smarter and more intelligent appearance. She transacts every business and has the final veto in all affairs. She is perhaps the freest Hindu woman.

And her lord is the most amiable of henpecked husbands.

The fisherman looks weather-beaten but strong. He is a credulous fellow, and a great drunkard. The brine has perhaps affected his brain. He is the silliest creature in the world—yes, sillier than the fish he himself baits. But he has a sweetness all his own, simple as his smiles, touching and child-like. He is kind to all creation except the fish he is born to bait. He never once in his life means mischief to any, even as a pious experiment. He is an honest, truthful, simple fellow. He never whines at you for his ill-luck in life. He draws you into a kinder attitude towards him. He accepts calmly fair and foul weather alike, on the land and the sea.

The smooth course of the *sembadavan's* life is subject to two kinds of excitement. The one is religious and

the other is marital. He has generally an annual religious festival in April or May. It is a ten days' glory, and the hero is the priest who dances with a mud-pot on his head and walks over live embers. The propitiated deity is always the "Mari Amman"—the good goddess of small-pox. Her favour is more valued than even Neptune's. My fisherman is the happiest mortal on these occasions, when he escapes from the serpentine charms of his sea life for the homely pleasures of the gin shop and the joy of the madding crowd.

There is yet another aspect to his religious activity, which links him forever with the life of the village and takes away his professional and caste isolation. During the annual festival of the village temple, he has the right to carry its decorated idols in the streets. He is broad-shouldered, like Atlas, and naturally he is the chosen

vehicle of the Gods. The temple car moves only at his touch in its annual processional round. The muscle-power well-practised at tugging the net-haul, is found efficient in putting into motion the stately and giant car which every temple owns and which evokes in the name of God the co-operative life of the entire neighbourhood. My *sembadavan* willingly does these temple services at great sacrifice and physical labour, and in return the gods hallow his *catamaran* to be seaworthy for a year, bless his net with the heaviest haul, and stand by him in the perils of the sea.

The other excitement is marriage. It is of unusual importance. It is a call to focus the tribal co-operation on the most full-hearted scale. For my fishermen are a closely endogamous tribe. The bride and the bridegroom are nearly always cousins. Seldom does the fisherman go out of the



family circle or beyond the village frontier for his bride. The marriage is a simple ceremonial. The bridegroom's party generally does the proposing, and the other may accept or reject the offer. The marriage festival is made the occasion for a complete surrender to the call of pleasure. The whole tribe gets into a hilarious uproar and drowns for the moment even the mild protest and the inviting reminder of the ocean billows. When the four days of merriment and tamasha are over, the bridegroom once again rides on his *catamaran*, dolphin-like, over the back of the waves.

Their system of government is a pure form of timocracy. At any rate in rural parts, where the British Raj is not much in evidence, this is the prevailing system. Let us take a village, say, with five hundred fishermen. It is divided roughly into five

groups of one hundred souls, with the richest man in each hundred as representative for his unit. The richest of the five rich men who constitute the executive council is naturally the leader. At the head of the council, once a month, on new moon days or on Fridays—which are their Sundays—he decides all disputes, both civil and criminal. He is the judge to fix the punishment and the fines, while the remaining four are empanelled as the jury to return the verdict of “guilty” or “not guilty”. But the aggrieved party has always a higher court of appeal—the landed aristocracy of the village. Acquittals are rare in this august tribunal, and heavy fines are levied, which are used for constructive purposes of common good. The fisherman avoids the law courts and has little love for the complex ways and devious subtilities of modern life.

The fishermen have one curious merit which scientists might well envy. They are living barometers. They are the natural observatories of every seacoast village. By weather conditions on the sea, by the colour of the horizon and the twist of the waves and the wind, they can exactly predict the coming storm or rain, even days in advance. They have an almost intuitive knowledge of these things. Even the lad playing on the sea sand has some foresight of the weather conditions on the sea and the day's prospect of good fishing.

On the whole, my *sembadavan* is a highly philosophic fellow. Only his philosophy is not laid in script but lived out in life. He touches the land only to retire, wave-like, into the sea. His serene indifference to this ever-changing world has sometimes made me spell his name with an accent of pity. But he simply smiles at me in

reverent wonder and passes on, leaving the throb and the dust of the land to me and its primary dwellers.

Indeed my *sembadavan* is a fellow anointed by the gods for a high mission. He has the qualities of a great race. He is the soul of acceptance and reconciliation in this ever-warring world. He wears on his brow the innocence of the ever-lasting seas and the pearl-like sweat of the land. If you seek for peace and virtue among the haunts of men, you will find them only here—within sound of the hollow roar of the waves—among these straggling huts, half-buried in sand and embroidered with sea foam.

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## VILLAGE CRICKET

INDIAN village cricket is a picturesque cousin of the English game. The Aryan genius the world over is the same, but its tropical variation is interesting in my sun-tanned Province. Village cricket is a well-preserved piece of antiquity. It is a prehistoric survival. It is older than the Chola dynasty of kings. Age has not destroyed it. It has the heart of youth and the soul of life.

The game is quite simple. The ball is delightfully homespun. An areca-nut is the nucleus round which a few rags are dressed up into a crude globe, and this is well bound with twisted aloe-fibre. The areca-nut has an esoteric meaning. It is believed to endow this bundle of rags with the

spring and elasticity inherent in the conception of a ball. As for the bat, it is even simpler—a lusty log of *Puvarachan*, known as the indigenous teak of the Tamils, with its bark peeled off, cut to the length of two feet and of respectable weight—a fine provocative of muscular endeavour. This random timber has a dual function. For, in our village cricket, the bat is also the wicket. The moment the ball is sent off—our village stalwarts always score boundaries—the bat assumes another duty. It becomes the wicket when laid flat a few inches above the ground, supported by bricks at the ends.

In village cricket the batsman is independent of the tyrannical skill of the bowler. He simply takes the ball in his left hand and hits it with the bat in the right hand and away flies the ball. And it is the function of the bowler—he who picks up the ball

is the bowler—to take his stand at an appointed distance and hit surely and clearly the “bat-wicket,” and dislodge it from its six-inch eminence and send it down rolling on the ground. This is the only way in which the batsman is bowled out in our village cricket.

So much for the “instruments” of the game. As for the game itself, it is the sunniest of pastimes. It has the wayward mirth of the evening breeze. Under the shade of coco-nut palms, by the side of the village tank, amid the rippling laughter of girls carrying home pails of water at the hip, leaning and glancing gently to the side, the game is a glorious feast for the youth. One kindles the other. Such is the playground, and it is worthy of the game; for well it nurses the cardinal virtues of rural life.

The rules of Indian village cricket are the freest in the world. Every one is a

player as well as a spectator. The one changes into the other with god-like grace, as the luck of the moment falls or rules. It is all one live crowd of joy, moving and mating as chances come and go. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, mingle together, and make or mar each other. If man is equal, it is here. Such is the kindling mirth of village cricket.

How much, O modern cricketer, should you envy your rustic colleague who simply takes the ball in his left hand and flourishes the bat—and away flies the ball. Just as a crisis calls forth the man, the occasion improvises the true village bowler. The crowd of players and spectators give chase to the ball—for every one is a player and a spectator—and the most successful, in the madding confusion and nervous joy, hastens to the honoured post of the bowler. He has to bowl hard, for



the ball is too small for the ponderous wicket which has to be dislodged from its eminence, and he has to bowl quickly, for the disappointed crowd is already giving him chase and a stronger fellow, in mere sport, may yet deprive him at the last moment of the fruits of his victory, the joy of a fling at the wicket. In such bewilderment, no wonder my bowler always misses and the same batsman begins again with the usual applause. So my batsman is the master of the day, and he knows how to lord it over all. In the contentions of the crowd and the liberties of the game, though not in his own skill, like many an anointed king of yore, he finds his own security.

Romantic interludes are not rare, which save the play from the monotony of confusion and give it its real charm and vast human interest. The mighty bat sends the small ball often

a considerable distance, and sometimes to the well-designed obscurity of a neighbouring bush. Then all join together for a great exploration, and the little republic, fed by sensation and by the democratic idea that the batsman has lost his primacy, even if it be for a while, moves on to dig out the wearied ball from its modest retirement. The successful finder, as a reward for his discovery, is voted to the bat by the jubilant republic which has now naturally grown tired of the continuous imposition of a single man. This is the only sure step to the throne, the one vulnerable spot of the batsman. Herein lies the weakness of my cricketer—the danger of the bush and not of the bowler.

Village cricket would be nothing but for its freedom from rules. Hilarity is its aim and there is no reckoning of runs, and the vexatious laurels of a "century". The game is enjoyed for

the long and wild running that it gives, with true democratic insight, to all, the spectators as well as the players. Friend! may it thrive long! For, after all, Indian village cricket too is but a slice of Life.

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## THE HINDU TEMPLE

THE Hindu temple is the emblem of the religious life of an Indian village. It is the inspirer of all the qualities inherent in the Hindu. It is the corner-stone of his orthodoxy, the bedrock of his piety, the sanctifying source of his sacred ash. It is the centre of his spiritual illumination. It is ever the dream of his hopes and the hope of his dreams.

A Temple in ruins is a reproach to the community. It is a cancer in the village body-politic. It is a deep cut in our spiritually sempiternal memory. It is a refuge for botanical life. It is the topic of the day. Towards it gravitates the life of the scattered neighbourhood. It is a divine invitation to the son-less rich to repair

and endow the temple. It is a chance to carve your name on the village pyramid.

The Hindu temple is consecrated by a thousand gracious legends. Time has quietly spun its ancient and costly fabric of traditional lore in infinite varieties of colour and pattern, and clothed every nook and corner. The presiding Lord of the temple, apart from the universal range of His consciousness, has always a particular local interest of considerable charm and value. He reveals a stage in the evolution of the Hindu conception of God. He has always a detached local vision. Legend paints Him under one stress of spiritual passion. He supplies the impulse which gives the artistic unity to the scattered and individual traditions of the temple. He keeps the satellites in their proper orbits. An idea of service to humanity, of liberation from suffering, is the

key-note of every temple—a conception of Love and Service petrified into an idol and varied with multitudinous faces. Round this, the decorative instinct in man builds the temple.

The Hindu temple is an architectural attraction as well as a spiritual solace. It is an imposing structure. It is of grand and spacious design. The sacred area is enclosed by massive walls of brick or stone with the tower-like structure known as the pagoda or the *gopuram* in the middle of the boundary walls on all the four sides. It marks the entrance to the temple and naturally the entrance to the gods is on all the four directions though the East is of primary importance. The *gopuram* is the most striking feature of the Hindu Temple. The entrance is roughly a spacious fifteen-feet cube. Over it the *gopuram* rises, pyramid-like, on broad and massive foundations often to a height of sixty

feet, tapering into points of gold. It is a rectangular pile of storied buildings, narrow and labyrinthine, lofty and ever-ascending like the over-soul of a Vedantin. It is the spiritual light-house of the race. When the evening bells go out on their wavy roll in air, the mud-stained labourer in the field, the mother at home, and the children who play "hide and seek" in the courtyard all lift their eyes and hands to the gold-tipped summit of the *gopuram*, now radiant in the soft-spreading even light. For the sight of the *gopuram* at this matin hour is sight of the gods.

In a temple the whole space is measured out into rooms and convenient corridors. The central chamber is the finest, and therein is fixed on a pedestal the rock-cut Lingam, which is the image of the presiding Deity—the Swami from whom the temple

takes its name. The Ambal—the divine consort of the Lord—holds her sway in another room of equal eminence. The minor gods are arranged in rows along the collonades. They come in only for the casual obeisance of the over-pious. A number of glow-worm lamps, fed with slimy oil and fixed artistically, illuminate with a pale effulgence the sombre idol of the Swami, wrapped up in gracious slumber with a charming disregard for posture.

There are a few indispensables. They must always find a place in every temple at precisely the same quarter. There is, for instance, at the inner entrance, the Elephant-Lord Ganesha, rolling his trunk on his magnificent paunch, who bids you a cordial welcome. He is the son of Parvati—the consort of Iswara. He is still a bachelor. He has hitched his ideals of matrimony to



possibly to a comet. He is still on the look-out for a suitable bride. He is a tireless critic. He is the fountain-head of single blessedness, the source of inspiration and strength to bachelors. He is a favourite with students, who heartily pray to him for a better fate for themselves. He is the most popular of the Hindu pantheon, and his goodwill is a necessary condition of success. He relishes best from the devotee a few coco-nuts and infinite sitting on the heels and standing up with the hands crossed to the ears, and then also a gentle but rapid thumping of the forehead in a prescribed form. A day in every year is allotted to him, and his clay model is worshipped in every Hindu home with ample, festive rejoicings.

Again there is the bull or Nandhi, of splendid workmanship, in the quailing posture usual to the species. He is the proper personage to whom

you should communicate, at the close of your worship, the expiring sparks of your piety. Your devotion receives the hall-mark of approval and the touch of finish only from him. You should make the sacred animal feel the rapturous pressure of your palm, preferably at its hind-quarters. At the moment of contact, you should hum aloud your devotional message of parting. Then he is supposed to nod you the leave to go home.

Lastly, there is the "Chandikesvarar" or "the perverse and obstinate Being". He is the only unsocial element in the Hindu Pantheon. He owns almost a rival, miniature temple in some shaded, secluded corner. The lizard, though not the lion, presumably to his great regret, keeps him company. He is an exacting angel. He is noted for his austere penances and remorseless severity. He is a single-handed fighter against the three-crores of Hindu gods.

He loves fratricidal war. He absorbs half the merit of the whole worship, if the worshipper forgets him in the plethora of gods. He has nothing but contempt for coco-nuts and plantains, and such secular offerings. He insists on purity, humility and the spirit of worship. He acknowledges nothing but a sincere clap of hands, which serves to relieve him of a cluster of frightened lizards which creep slimily over him. He is dressed, against his will, in a red rag raging with vermillion. Within his premises he is a terror to little children, but at a distance is quite a pleasure to the little ones, who then ringingly clap their hands for sheer joy.

But with the Swami and the Ambal, the presiding couple, it is all sunshine and joy. They are the vital centres of interest. They are the guardian angels of the neighbourhood, the spiritual custodians. They sanctify

the place and enfranchise the village. Hence their worship is elaborate and full of laborious details. There is much humanising of God in our method of worship. The ceremony is full of extremely secular symbols. There is a regular service of dinner and supper, and a perspiring god is sympathetically treated to fanning. Incense and camphor refresh the damp air; leaves and flowers of peculiar traditional holiness and value are freely used in the worship. The daily bath of the idol is private, and is a matter only between the priest and the deity. The Swami is dressed up in beautiful silk or white cloth and smeared with sandal paste, while the Ambal, the consort of the Lord, is holy and refulgent with vermillion. Whether the Swami is in the shape of a Lingam, or cut in the image of man, he is always of a striking personality. Special care is taken in

decorating his eyes and forehead with gold or silver. In the conical shape of the Lingam, he is the symbol of creation, and in the magnificent figure of a man with hands and eyes, he is a statue of the stalwart of the race.

A noteworthy feature in every temple is the presence of at least one tank, dedicated to the Swami or Ambal. Its water is endowed with healing properties. Forty-five baths, regularly, one every day, are believed to cure all diseases of body and soul. In some places, the bath in the tank is more sacred than even worship at the temple. The tank itself is a most imposing sheet of water. It is well laid-out, on a lavish scale, with flights of stone steps on all the four sides. For sheer scenic effect of excellence and care, the tank in the Hindu temple is remarkable. Apart from its special sanctity, the temple tank is greatly useful to the village people.

It gives them an unfailing supply of water. And as such it is the most cherished of the many holy attractions of the temple.

But the crowning glory of the Hindu temple is the celebrated car. It is a dream in timber which visualises Heaven and Earth. It is the stateliest projection of the soul of the Hindu mind. It is the pillar of our pictorial life. It is the rallying-point of all castes and creeds. It is the supreme exponent of the oneness of man in the service of God, be he a Brahmana or a Pariah. It is the symbol of united worship.

The car itself is a stately pile of timber, carved into all the exquisite images known to Hindu architecture. It stands upon four immense wooden wheels, and measures from head to foot thirty to fifty feet, broad at the bottom and tapering at the head. Once every year—the month and the day

vary with the traditions—the Swami and the Ambal move out of the temple and are seated on a spacious platform in the specially designed middle of the car, and there they shine in the very atmosphere of decorated virtue. Very early in the morning, the car starts on its processional round through the main streets of the village. To put in motion this ponderous vehicle, and wheel it again to its original starting-point, along the sandy roads, is a task of considerable effort. It requires the day-long toil of over a thousand men. But the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the Brahmana and the Pariah, sink the marks of difference and the pain of labour in the cheer of common co-operative effort in the worship of God.

Every temple has its own annual festive season. The whole scheme is unmatched for sheer decorative display.

It gives a stimulus to all the local trades. It brings in people from all parts. The gods come out of the temple and live with the people in spirit. Portable copper images of the real Swami and the Ambal, sacred with vicarious power, are used for processional purposes. Fragrant with flowers, and iridescent with rubies and diamonds, they are seated on *vahanams* or vehicles, such as the Elephant, Peacock, Mouse, Horse, or Garuda, worked in plated silver or gold as the temple purse permits. These are carried on men's shoulders along the streets, and then indeed every Hindu home is instinct with true religious emotion.

The annual revenue of a temple is considerable. From the poorest to the richest, it varies from one thousand rupees to three lakes. Such is the care and energy with which our souls are tended and developed. The temple



is the be-all and end-all of our existence. At any rate it has been so till now. But European civilisation is fast making inroads into our beliefs.

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## MY LITTLE "ARUNALAM"

My Pariah is called Arunachelam. He is named after the great Hill-God of Southern India; for in the mellow splendour of the full moon, while she was exalted in Taurus, my little Arunalam was born in the month of *Karthigai* on the day dedicated to the Hill-God. The sacred fire that lit in a blaze the summits of the far-off *Thiruvannamalai* shone with human warmth in the cottage of my Pariah. Arunalam is a late gift to his parents and the eldest born. He is the son of Nochi—the stalwart, the terror of the neighbourhood, the adored of my grandfather, and the *thangalān* of the caste or the head of the Pariahs.

The loneliness of a generation is no more. The long-running river, worn

out to a thread in summer time and at the brink of the sea, has at last found a secret spring of life. My little Arunalam is the new-born hope of all these crowded metaphors of joy. Rolled up in rags, and intimate with mother earth through the eyes of rents, my little Arunalam, shooting his tender projectiles into the air, peals forth lusty cries melodious to the parental ear. The long-denied voice of the son of Nochi gladdens the tribal heart of the *paracheri*. The arduous mantle of his forefathers has already fallen on him, and even at birth he is anointed to the duties of hard and honest citizenship on the field. And it is a good thing he proposes to face this deaf world with a pair of lusty lungs.

Days pass on in silent majesty, quickening the pulse and the powers, kindling the ambitions and aspirations of my little Arunalam. Every day he

is more decidedly nature's insurgent rebel. The caressing fondness of his mother only emboldens his childhood's adventures across the frontier to gather grapes of thistles. The moment he knew how to crawl out of the cradle, he had to face the problem of living. Neither the sword would he wield nor, much less, the pen. And in the wake of Shri Krishna he begins with the stick of the cowherd—the symbol of his first sovereignty. From seven to ten he rules over the empire of cattle.

So my little Arunalam may be seen with a stick longer than himself and a dozen full-sized cattle! Nothing is more heroic in life than his woodland rambles, tending the naughty animals. But nature, always kinder than man, whispers the message of Eternal Love. The sagacious animal and the little fellow begin to know and help each other. Sympathy renders all life one.

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My little Arunalam finds cattle kinder and more grateful than men. And a god-like friendship springs between man and beast. Under the shade of trees, hid from the calm-pouring noonday tropical sun, with the breeze lazily loitering among the boughs that hearken to the melodious notes of birds, my little Arunalam, swinging like a squirrel, is cast in the very image of the Divine Herd. Ah! for the Love and Rhythm in nature. The oldest buffalo and its youngest master take a mutual fill of gazing.

The day declines into the evening and the herd is called home. The rambles have fatigued him. The oldest buffalo knows it and helps him to a ride on its back. Thus every day the vehicle of the great destroyer Yama becomes the vehicle of my little Arunalam. Nature swells him with pride. He rejoices with an exceeding joy. He breaks out into pure woodland music on the

glory of the sinking sun. The gentle East wind wafts his song to the west, and the music dies in the bosom of a cloud on the far-off, God-enshrined hill-tops, covered with the sandal and the wild rose. And my little Arunalam strolls back home to sleep on the bosom of his mother.

But the hours of music are evanescent in life, and Arunalam, with the inherited instinct, knows it too well. From the cradle he has been hurried to the herd, and the pastoral air has nourished him into a promising lad. And the lad is now hurried into the man. The toils of the field he has already tasted as a relieving hand. He is now coveted in his tender youth for adult labour.

It is the month of July. The Cauvery Delta is flooded with generous monsoon falls from the distant Coorg. It is the call of nature for the magic of my little Arunalam. He, like his



ancestors in the wake of the all too solitary furrow of the pariah, has consecrated his body and soul to the plough. He sinks thigh deep in the puddle. But he manfully toils, true to the name of his father. Even in his first agricultural term, when the youth is yet unequal to the hard labour of the field, he is cheered into adult suffrage. The romance of the herd has faded, even on the first evening twilight on the field. Hardly has the season ripened to harvesting ere my little Arunalam has been forged into manhood by dint of forced industry and compelling penury.

Arunalam has now proven his merit for adult wages, which entitles him further to shed his single blessedness. In true bridal apparel, brimming with the most vital and primitive of joys, he looks the very model of creation for the happy end of race perpetuation. In stature stalwart, in bearing dignified, all brawn

and muscle, the gift of daily toil, he is easily Nature's well-built child. He is dark in complexion as the rain-bearing cloud, and no less fertilising. When he calls me from the back yard, in fear and hope, for his daily wages, I love him and his race, and his grateful voice.

Arunalam is the secret of my agricultural prosperity. He is as essential as the monsoon and no less generous. He is industrious as the bee. The manna he collects with care, with equal diligence is snatched away by an alien hand. But what is it to him? Does the bee refuse to suck the flowers or build the honeycomb again? Like the Kaveri, whose fertilising waters with nightless vigils he turns over my acres, my little Arunalam is a nature force. Himself clad in loin-cloth, he clothes by the unremitting labour of his hand the bare universe around, in one mantle of green. Nature takes its charm from the witchcraft of his

hand. Pampered man! You know him not. Dewdrops make immortal his name in script of pearls on blades of grass, which he has grown. Creation looks up to him for the life-giving Fire in his hand.

Arunalam is as unlettered as Vayu and Varuna—the primal elements of Nature. The schools and colleges are no more for him than they are for the ocean that rolls in tidal waves, the wind that blows wherever it listeth, the stars that twinkle because of innate iridescence. The barrenness of brick and mortar—and modern life, he avoids even their shadow. But what script or culture could make a man like my little Arunalam!

His is always a message of Labour and Love to our ancient land. But he, like the great *avatars*, only nestles on its fringe. And he is restless like the toiling wave between the land and the sea. He is all alone in this

wide world. Over his fields, never weary of watching like Cerberus, he is wedded perhaps to the friendly twinkles of distant Orion. The raptures of his life are the verities of a fixed orbit of labour, even as the diurnal rounds of the earth. The sorrows of his life are only his master's regulated parsimony of a Madras measure of paddy. I love my little Arunalam and his race even as the salt of the earth.

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## THE HINDU PILGRIM

THE Hindu pilgrim is a sight of imperishable memory. He shines in a crowd like a grain of gold in sand. He is a spiritual monument of our race. He is a step and an experiment in the realisation of an ideal. Tradition has moulded him as never wind and rain polished an erratic boulder. He is ever on the march to the kingdom of God.

The Hindu Pilgrim is a restless wanderer. His is a life of continuous journeying from Benares to Rameshwar, and back again from Rameshwar to Benares. It is also a life of continual bathing in the twenty thousand sacred waters, collected and flowing, which fertilise this ancient land of

Baratha. In the twilight joy of moving and bathing the Hindu pilgrim consecrates the sunrise and sunset of his soul. And he is the least dust-laden of tropical beings. He is as restless, as the Lingam which he worships is immobile. And never were God and man in more perfect harmony.

The secret of his life is his soul, which he always holds in patience. Faith is the first article of his creed, and the Hindu pilgrim is a born believer. Call him a gullible fellow. He graciously nods away your rebuke. Chide him for his superstition. He will only tell his beads quicker and with more of devotion. Ask him, in the name of God, the texture of his faith, he will point out the star-lit sky and the temple corner of the village. You beguile him into a metaphysical talk, as to the inner revelations of his soul and the appetites of

his mind and the secrets of his yoga method, his eye gleams in the corner. Subtle and impassioned grows the exposition, and the heathen inquirer becomes almost the *chela*. The pilgrim conceives his vocation as the grandest in life, and his is the complete surrender to a call. He realises himself in self-effacement, in meditation and social service. The origins of life are the end of his bookless researches. Like many a great explorer, the Hindu pilgrim also is tracing the source of the River of Life—even in the bosom of a cloud wandering wayward in noonday sky.

The Hindu pilgrim falls under two classes. He is either the perpetual or the periodic. The perpetual pilgrim is always in quest of the Great One everywhere. His search after the true God is a scheduled regularity. From Cape Comorin to Haridwar, every week he moves on from district to district,

from one holy place to another, covering annually over two thousand miles, either by train or by foot. The ecstatic vigour of such an experience, even from a tourist viewpoint, is immense. And to the Hindu pilgrim the experience is simply transcendental. It is no wonder. Because no one Hindu temple, though so well agreeing in essentials and outline, is wearisomely like another. The shrine is different. The tradition is different. The architecture is variedly picturesque. The location, whether on hill-top or on level sand, on river's edge or on ocean-fringe, is always impressive. In such an environment, even a prosaic soul easily becomes stirred. And to the Hindu pilgrim it is one vision splendid. It is a rapture and a revelation. The temporal aspects of life put on only a transient clothing. To the perpetual pilgrim the temple is the greatest verity in life. He knows no other



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truth or vocation. He is for the worship of God everywhere, both on the blazing sand at the Equator and on the most inaccessible snow-clad Himalayan hill-top. He keeps on his restless pilgrim wanderings till he reaches a state of spiritual exaltation when God reveals Himself to him. Then he has come to the end of his march and seeks a fixed abode for the rest of his life. Where nature is both silent and charming, he selects his *ashrama*, far away from the crowd. His wants have always been few, and now they are even less. With the passing of years, he finally merges into a celebrated Sadhu, with healing powers as renowned as those of Jesus.

Even as the source of the greatest rivers of the world is but humble, the origin of the perpetual pilgrim is quite modest. He is born a citizen of the world, free from the engrossing

conservatism of parental care. He is the outcome of a crisis in the fortunes of his former worldly career. He is the creature of a neglectful world, not always parental to the pangs of hunger. Every soul that breaks out into a Bolshevik in Europe or a Sinn Feiner in Ireland, peacefully passes, in this homeland of Buddha, into a perpetual Hindu pilgrim—a quiet teller of beads. The heart that rises to a curse, changes at the throat to a benediction. Such is the evolution and the ideal of Hinduism.

As for the periodic pilgrim, he is always a respectable householder. He undertakes a pilgrimage only for purposes of expiation or for the acquisition of extra religious merit. As a successful worldly man, he is always conscious of his sins of omission and of commission. He regretfully uses the necessary alloy, in the making of money, which this exacting world always imposes on its

citizens. But he would most gladly give his hands at least a periodic washing in the sacred waters of his ancient land. A pilgrimage to Benares and Rameshwar will not only promote the virtues of his seed, but is sure to give him a fresh and pure start for his balance of years in the game of life. It quiets his conscience. He returns to work from the holy shrines, chastened with more of faith and energy to face the subtle ways of the world. And his neighbour attaches greater sanctity to his name.

As for the religious merits of the periodic pilgrimage, they are untold. The spiritual benefits of a pilgrimage are the most bounteously given of Heaven's blessings. The crowning gift is the birth of a son to a barren couple. There is no Hindu householder who does not invoke the aid of the Lord at Rameshwar to perpetuate his *gotra*. Along with the cleansing of

multifarious sins of thought, speech and action, he prays also for *moksha*. And the prayer of the sincere devotee is supposed to be heard never in vain.

But the periodic pilgrim is, in the first place, a tourist *par excellence*, with an eye to everything, including God, and a sense of full worldly enjoyment. He always goes out on his pilgrimage with wife and children, and also some poor relations. It is the injunction of the Smrithis not to neglect poor relations—and they may be helpful on his way. Abroad, the home feeling is kept intact and the affections are even better nourished in journeying. The quarrels of the home are forgotten for the moment, and the family are knit closer in the glory of motion to Rameshwar.

Rameshwar is a small coral island in the South Eastern corner of India, near the Equator, full of nothing but sand-dunes, windswept and dry, and an

ever-shining sun. The bathing is pleasant in shallow sea water, with ripples which never swell into waves. The endless waste of water without sea-murmur, and the endless waste of sand without man-murmur, fills the mind with a sense of the Divine and the Universal. Such is Rameshwar and its grip on the Hindu pilgrim. And Rameshwar is the holiest of holy places.

The Hindu pilgrim is as a coral reef covered with palm and vine above the restless toss of the ocean wave. The work of ages lies hidden below the sea-blue. His life is not that of the water drop that turns to pearl on a lucky constellation. He springs from the depths of the sea of life. He has seen every tempest, felt every toss of the angry wind and the wave. He is born to conquer, and knows it.

The Hindu pilgrim is a silent witness of the divine in all. He stands

for the root-concept that underlies the most complicated systems of philosophy. He stands beyond the qualities, symbolic yet formless. The Hindu pilgrim is the consecrated triumph of centuries of traditional moulding. Modern civilisation, with its "fire engines," has only quickened his walking space, but has not robbed him of the primary faith of his nature which yet rules uncorrupt.

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## MY GRANDMOTHER

My grandmother is of noble lineage. She has lived to a great age and alas, her only regret is that Time has removed from the plane of life all her contemporaries. But age has not soured her temper. Except for a wayward irascibility, she is a splendid ruler, exercising at mellow eighty an unceasing control over a joint-family of a dozen adult members.

My grandmother is a benevolent despot. Her rule is universal. She has you in the hollow of her hand. She breaks the youngest colt with subtlety and vigour to the rather old-time traditions of her chariot. You cannot run away from her. She ever rules you in all matters from sunrise to sunset. She holds always in her

hands the reins of government. Nothing escapes or wearies her eye. She is the patron of orthodoxy and the red rag of the social reformer. She is an indomitable worker. Age has made her but more agile. She is at work earlier than morning dew, churning the curd into whey and butter for her sons and grandsons. And earlier than the twilight of dawn she wakes up the members of the house, each to his or her appointed work. She is an exemplary ruler. Even the most naughty grandson yields to her command, her talent for the occasion, her unbending will and unfailing energy for work. My grandmother is the family queen to her last pulse-beat.

Her preservative power is immense. She is the *Adishesha* who keeps stable our rather unsteady planet. She is the apostle of conservatism. She is very much attached to the old and

looks with disdain on the new. She is the founder of the system of philosophy known in common parlance as "drive slowly". She always represents the opposition in the council chamber of the joint family. She is the stronghold against which is brought up in vain the pickaxe of the enthusiast and the revolutionary. She has the vision of the prophet and the walking pace of the practical man in the street. Her ideal is the accomplished real. She is the mainspring of the Hindu joint family and its most efficient regulator. She has weathered many a storm, and no captain loves better his fresh-tarred vessel.

My grandmother is ancient and holy as the cedars of Lebanon. She has the secret of long life and enduring vigour of mind. Three generations have sprung from her whose life and character she has nourished

with the unrelenting energy of her own mind, with simple deeds of virtue in homely fields of work. The daughters of the house she has moulded with sufficient elasticity for the harmonious pleasures of conjugal life in a transplanted atmosphere, and the sons of the house with iron discipline. The daughters-in-law plucked from stems of varying temper and taste, she grafts upon the rigorous unity and traditional design of her own family; because my grandmother is the inheritor of a proud home culture which she keeps alive and enriches.

But in the Hindu family she is always accorded a dual reception. Every one has an affectionate corner for her; but all the same the common effort is to resist her supremacy. But she is equal to the crisis. The daughter-in-law, with bending grace and yielding charm, in soft-falling words and smiling lips, breaks into ripples the

placid rule of my grandmother. The sons and grandsons wink with pleasure in love's enchantment, and "unworthy" cries the grand old maternal heart, holding the reins even firmer. And my grandmother, with dynamic skill, changes every friction into light and every cry into a song. And with each conquest her rule is made more secure and better integrated.

So much for the ruler. As for the kingdom, the Hindu joint family is the most democratic and the best-governed in the world. Its ancestral house is full of stories and traditions. The spider has its silken web at every corner. The foundations of the home were laid by the grandfather of my grandmother in those affluent days when paddy was selling at four annas per *kalam*. With palmyra rafters and bamboo poles, with its indigenous beams and pillars, with its spacious courtyards and never-ending corridors and windowless rooms, the

ancestral home of the joint family is the very quintessence of rural life. There is neither stint nor economy, either in conception or in execution. This home, which some long-dead grandfather has reared, my grandmother preserves with an inherited care and fondness. With its backyard of vegetable garden, it is dear and nourishing to the sense of family pride and comfort. It transmits undiminished the fortunes of the line, and is self-sufficient for the needs of family life. None, not even a spirited grandson, afflicted with modern architectural affinities, would ever dream of altering its structure lest the established fortune of his family should escape through his irreverent though sanitary ideas of house-building. So the ancestral home is always intact, and inspires the same emotion and faith in the mind of its inmates from generation to generation. It is the very model of

an ordered and religious life, the source of all that is pious and pure in the daily life of the Hindu.

A respectable Hindu family is, even as a cluster of bananas, never less than a dozen in number. Mine begins with my grandmother, alert at eighty, and closes with her great grandson, but a month old, rebellious in the cradle. Youth and beauty, age and wisdom, set in the merry ring of children's voice, mingle together to make this godly life of perfect joy. Brothers and sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law, sons and grandsons, live and move together like water drops in the ocean wave. Each forms in turn, over trifling things, a storm centre. But my grandmother, by a waving of the hand, makes the family the home of calm and peace. The diverse talents and temper that each from each brings out in the daily round of work, shade but deeper and greener the web of life. One

learns from the other the precious hints—the dull from the quick, the quick from the slow. Youth learns from age, and age from youth. Backwards and forwards flies the shuttle in the Loom. Together they weave the living mantle of God.

The Hindu family is the greatest conservative tradition and reality of our civilisation. It is full of sweetness, even as the honeycomb, its sweetness, as honey, separated, assimilated and deposited in individual cells. It is the Rishi-made school for the Hindu from the cradle to the grave. No generation wastes its sweetness in the Hindu joint family, but leaves behind its experience and work for a richer harvest in succeeding years.

The Hindu family is the paradise of poor relations. Here alone man toils to share the fruits of his labour with his weaker brethren. It is the only democracy known to me just and



complete. My grandmother at its head often tells me with a pensive light in her face that in this *kaliyuga*, the race is not always to the swift nor success to the strong. Her only grandmotherly duty is to hold even the scales in the conflicts of the home among the children of her loins. She is most dearly loved by all, the earning and the non-earning, the fecund and the sterile.

The Hindu joint family is the age-long exponent of Socialism on a family basis. It is the model of co-ordinated work. The functioning is perfect. The health is excellent. Its key-note is self-restraint and discipline. Its qualities are the very virtues of evolution. It has the evergreen spaciousness of a banyan tree and the impressiveness of a spiral monument. It is the heart of Hindu culture and the coping-stone of its civilisation. It is the inspirer of its love-laden songs

and thought-laden philosophy. It is the most fragrant, immortal *champak* flower of Aryan culture. In the autumn dust and wind of modern life, the petals are falling off. Ere long the flower will be no more. May at least its immortal Fragrance live for ever in the memory of man!

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## MY NEIGHBOUR

MY neighbour was once a Sub-Registrar of Assurances. He graduated at the University of Madras in those palmy days when diplomas were pagoda trees in the Treasure Island. He was a successful though not a brilliant student, but even now he remembers his first textbook on logic, and the life of Bacon. When he was barely seventeen, he was crowned with the diploma by the Chancellor himself, like many other precocious and enterprising Tamil lads. And at eighteen, even before shedding his single blessedness, he triumphantly entered the Government Service on the usual regimental pay of rupees fifteen *per mensem*. He was a clerk under the very eye of the senior Dorai, Mr. Winterbotham,

a truant chip of British manhood which had floated down the Atlantic into the Bay of Bengal for the benighted Civil Service of Madras. Mr. Winterbotham was just closing his distinguished career, and in a few months he would retire on his pension and bid good-bye to India. My neighbour was just beginning his career, and was still in the toil of the breakers near the shore. He was quite aware of the mellow and generous mood of his master, who, he thought, might perhaps give him a lift as a parting favour. So my neighbour worked harder all the livelong day, even as Mr. Winterbotham, with a ripening pension, slackened the reins of office in the sultry and unambitious evening hours of his life. The days passed on, and Mr. Winterbotham, on the eve of his departure, anointed my neighbour as the Sub-Registrar of Assurances.

The stars of luck had, for the moment, set. Years rolled on, and my neighbour, though now a family man was in the clutches of a slow fortune plying his pen and stamp quietly unceasingly, in the far-away inland town of Wandiwash; till he caught the eye of the District Collector by his local repute for patience and industry and extra loyalty to the British Raj. The Collector pitied this obscure apostle of official virtue and swore that he would nevermore let Mr. Pichu Sastri share the dust of documents.

Ever since that fortunate day, my neighbour is no more the sterile roll-master of assurances, but a Deputy Tahsil, fecund with the resources of the British Empire. The Deputy Tahsil is the latest addition to the Hindu pantheon and the least mythological. The consecrating authority is the British Raj. His powers are wider than the Houses of Parliament, and his rule is

more conclusive than that of the great Mogul. For he is the symbol of the ruling power, the might of Britain and the strength of European civilisation. To the simple Hindu rustic, turning his field with his ancient plough-share, Mr. Pichu Sastri is the Sircâr. On him sits godlike the power and majesty of Britain.

Mr. Pichu Sastri is sprung of humble Brahmana parentage, of a priest's line. Every male ancestor of his family has inviolably been a *purohit* or a priest, well-learned in ritual mantras, better still in their choice recital, and best of all in restlessly spinning and swinging the hand spindle which twists the soft cotton into the sacred thread of the Brahmana. It is the only serious occupation of his leisure hour and the recreation of the most busy time. Such is the tradition of the family.

But what a change of inheritance from the hand spindle to the "Swan

pen" and "pince-nez". But Mr. Pichu Sastri is worth it. He is the last born of thirteen children to his mother, and the only surviving one. As his name tells me, he is the token of a humble wish, at the moment of his birth, that he at least may be spared by the Gods as alms unto an utterly broken-down maternal heart. "Pichu" means in Tamil "alms," and "Sastri" indicates the proud hereditary vocational surname. The title of Sastri is itself an enrichment gathered from years of philosophic and sacrificial work by the family members, as laid down in the Vedas. Therefore Mr. Pichu Sastri's name itself has the spell of wealth and life-giving power. No wonder, then, that Mr. Winterbotham and the nameless Collector yielded to the charm.

How my neighbour never could practise the ancestral vocation, happened this way. He lost his father while yet a boy of five, and grew under the

tender care of his mother. One day she sent Pichu to purchase some salt and he delightfully used the copper for sweetmeats, and returned a verdict to his mother that salt was nowhere available in the neighbourhood because of some wretched *sircar* regulation. For this pompous lie he received a good beating from his puritan mother. Like a spirited lad who should one day be the delight of the British Raj and the Deputy Tahsil, he ran up to the nearest railway station and took train, flying away from the ancestral home and the hand spindle at the comforting rate of forty miles an hour, till an extra vigilant ticket collector pulled him down for defrauding the company of its fare. Still undaunted, Mr. Pichu went about with valiant begging, till he secured a rich man who took him into his personal service, and then, attracted by his useful intelligence and nimbleness, put



him to school along with his boys, till Pichu ran up by double promotions and matriculated. Now, sufficiently a child of adversity, he has learnt enough to secure his B. A. degree at seventeen.

Bury the dead past and its story of lean and hungry years. Now Pichu is the Deputy Tahsil and all is milk and honey. He is greeted everywhere with obeisance. While in camp on revenue inspection, or at the headquarters exercising magisterial power, there is hardly one in his jurisdiction who does not bend his knee at the shrine. In addition to the goodly salary the Government have voted for his services, the people, as occasion calls forth, break coco-nuts and burn camphor to sweeten and straighten the sections of the Penal Code or to relax the rigour of his revenue administration. And Mr. Pichu Sastri, clothed in hauteur and reserve, looks the very embodiment of power and the

paragon of official virtue. His is a kingly life with the pomp of power, and the homage of the people.

But even he is surpassed by she. Mrs. Pichu transcends Mr. Pichu in sacerdotal eminence, even as the Ambal transcends the Swami in any Hindu temple. Mrs. Pichu has very decided views about her husband. He is simply the earning machine and a mere name-lender to her superior fortunes. She curses the wretched social regulation which sends the woman to the hearth. She has the better horoscope. Otherwise the obscure clerk, which her husband was at the time of his wedding, would never have become the Deputy Tahsil. The dreaded administrator of penal law outside his house, Mr. Pichu meekly says "Amen" to these domestic aspersions on his hard-won successes.

Mrs. Pichu is a clever and frugal lady. She is an excellent housewife

and a splendid shrew. She comes out of a family of small agriculturists with the ingrained habit of thrift. She knows the value and ring of money and how to make hay while the sun shines. She is an autocratic ruler in her jurisdiction, and even my Deputy Tahsil is governed. Mr. Pichu is as helpless at home as he is powerful abroad. Even the *menu* he cannot dictate, because it is an encroachment on her rights, an invasion of her home independence. With regard to Mr. Pichu's comforts she has the most ascetic notions. She has always a feeling that it is chronic dyspepsia from which her husband is suffering, though Mr. Pichu Sastri protests like an ineffectual angel against this diagnosis. He complains, at least outside, that he is not being properly fed and is most wrongly starved. Lean and hungry, he has to administer the criminal law of the land.

Thanks to the British Raj and the Deputy Tahsil, Mr. Pichu is not a stationary Magistrate tied to the sacrificial post, but he may move out on camp on revenue work whenever he feels hungry beyond endurance. Free from the clutches of this form of home tyranny, he invariably votes himself in camp the heartiest dinners and suppers. Even as the camel provides in its own hump the food for lean days—how often has Mr. Pichu envied the noble animal to which he bears some distant physical resemblance!—Mr. Pichu has tried to develop a reserve fund in his camp life to provide against the famine days of his home at the headquarters. It is always the thought of Mrs. Pichu and her unsympathetic ways which has marred the happiness of my neighbour, even in his ecstatic moments of joy. Otherwise he feels his career a pride and pleasure, and is cordially grateful to the British Raj.

His mother is yet alive in the chimney-corner, bent with the snows of a century and the neglect of the Deputy Tahsil. She yet has the maternal heart for dear Pichu, and pities the poor boy in the toils of a shrew. Mr. Pichu has always had a loving heart for his mother. Early in his life he had not the means to secure her comforts, and later, when he could, he was under prohibition from his noble partner for life, Mrs. Pichu, who has always considered her mother-in-law as the fly in her ointment. The motherly heart forgives everything for the sake of dear Pichu, the only one surviving of her thirteen children. She prays to her family God, with unceasing voice, that her son may live long enough to light with his own hand her funeral pyre and perform for her the last ceremonies of a son for her final emancipation. The mother affectionately condones the

neglect of her son and prays only for "the handful of fire," as the greatest tribute a son can offer her mother.

Mr. Pichu is now declining in the vale of years and of service, even as Mr. Winterbotham. The official virtue has now gone out of him. The shades of the evening are gathering round his devoted head. A life-time of hard work for this self-made man has weakened his staying power. He has but a few months more before full pension and honourable retirement. But he has a feeling that he will not live long to enjoy the fruits of service under a beneficent Government. His life is somehow growing unhappy, but still he remembers with joy his spirited youth which entrained for a maternal word.

His hair is turning grey. The wrinkles have set in. His sons and grandsons, as the children of the Deputy Tahsil, have not had the



and nothing was heard of Mr. Pichu. The aged mother was broken in twain. She was pining away in speechless grief.

It was a cheerless, neglected funeral, and lacked the "handful of fire" for which she had prayed so long from the hand of her son. Where is he? Clad in yellow robes, moving silently, came the figure of a Sanyasi to the funeral pyre, just at the right moment. "Ah mother! I am here, true to your wish. May your soul ascend to Heaven in peace. If I have virtue in me or in my holy Order, let this pile of wood break into flame without touch of earthly fire." It did break into flame indeed!

My neighbour and the whilom Deputy Tahsil is no more a man of the world, the administrator of penal law. He has joined like his grandfather, the *ashrama* which is the dream celestial of the Hindu. My



neighbour is now a Sanyasi, clad in yellow robes and consecrated to world service at Haridwar in the Himalayas, free of Mrs. Pichu and her race.

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## THE JAGATH GURU

OUR Adi Jagath Guru, or our first World Teacher, is the great Sankara. He was the Saviour of Hinduism at a critical moment of religious unrest, and its most virile and combative exponent. We reckon him an *avatar*, with an exceedingly intellectual and practical mission in an age of all-round decadence. He is our greatest thinker. His memory is more sacred to us than the Ganges, or even the sages who laid the foundations of the Hindu polity. Great in the achievements of his own life, he is still greater in the legacy of thought and institutions he founded for world service and knowledge. So grateful is the memory of man for his remarkable deeds, that to this day, even after

twelve centuries, his institutions flourish in their popular religious appeal. They are the seats of culture and philosophy. They are the centres of conservative yet enlightened Hinduism.

At any rate such is the *Kamakoti Pectam*, nestling on the Kaveri, which has nourished in its deltaic bosom five dynasties of kings from the third century B.C. It is now located at Kumbaconam, the brain centre of the Tamils. The great Sankara originally founded the *Kamakoti Pectam* at Conjeewaram, the noblest of ancient cities, in the spacious days of the seventh century A.D., where it prospered down to the seventeenth for over a thousand years. But in the early days of the East India Company and the unsettled times of the Moguls and the Maharattas, Conjeewaram was the storm centre of Carnatic wars. Then the *Kamakoti Pectam* was changed for ever from Conjeewaram

to Kumbaconam at the invitation of the Tanjore kings. Ever since, it has thriven well indeed in the peaceful and agricultural home of the Kaveri Delta.

*The Kamakoti Peetam* means "the Throne of the End of Desires". It is the symbol of work, love and knowledge—enjoyed, assimilated and conquered. It vindicates action in daily life. It seeks emancipation only through Knowledge which comes of varied experience and enjoyment according to the rules of *Dharma*.

The *Kamakoti Peetam* is the most comprehensive definition of the mind and mood of man. It takes in the Heaven and the Earth in one view. It bridges the void. It names and guides all the impulses of creation. It is a full-blooded gospel. It resolves into harmony the utter contradictions of life. It converges into the spotless ray of light the myriad hues of the

world. It is the seat of knowledge, abstract and concrete. It visualises every dream and every hope, and renders it in life and action. Its mind is universal.

The *Kamakoti Pectam* is a rare place on earth. Every inheritor of its proud name for over thirty generations has, for each generation, been the living symbol and exponent of a great and moving Faith. Strong and strenuous in the day's work, simple in habits of life, high in culture and fervid in temper, calm in action and pure in personal life, they have preserved the tradition and record of the *Kamakoti Pectam*.

Such is the inheritance to which he may be called who is by birth a Brahmana. And only a Brahmacharya, yet in the plastic mould of pure youth, is eligible for ascension to the *Kamakoti Pectam*. The moment he is nominated and ordained by his

predecessor-in-office, usually in his last dying moments, he becomes the Acharyaswami, or the Jagath Guru, to whom all Hindus render homage more royal than the allegiance they owe to their sovereign.

The first five years after succession are usually allotted for the training and education of the young Acharyaswami. It is a period of study and meditation in an inspiring environment, and he is aided in the task by some of the best Sanscrit pundits of Southern India. The qualities of the world teacher are naturally developed in the isolation of his exalted office. He easily becomes the centre of learning and the final arbiter of the first problems of life. Such is the original strength and purity of the great Sankara, that no successor of his, these twelve centuries and more, has ever been unworthy of this unique spiritual dynasty of world teachers.

The personal life of the Acharya-swami is one of the plainest living and the highest thinking. He is the hardest of all the workers during the hours of the day. Earlier than morning dew, he bathes in flowing water. Then the prescribed ceremonies and the meditations occupy more than three hours of the busy and solemn forenoon. Then he bathes again and begins the worship or *pūja* of Chandramouliswer, the radiant pebble Lingam, anointed and dedicated by the great Sankara himself as the secret and the inspiration of the *Kamakoti Peetam*. So the *pūja* of Chandramouliswer is the very soul of the *peetam*. The devotional mind of man these thousand years and over has gathered and poured without stint or economy at the feet of the radiant pebble Lingam, herbs and flowers, milk and honey, and every rare and precious spice in the world. The *pūja* takes more than

two hours, and is performed to the sound of music, before a large concourse of devotees who wait for the spoonful of *abishkam* water that has dripped over Chandramouliswer which incidentally enfranchises anyone for a hearty dinner at the expense of the Jagath Guru.

The sun has already declined in the west, and my Acharyaswami retires for his single meal a day, which is itself considered a 'limb' of the *pūja* of God Chandramouliswer. After dinner he again sets to work. The afternoon is taken up with disquisitions and the reception of visitors, learned and rich, from distant parts.

My Acharyaswami is royal and urbane, dignified and courteous. Sits lofty the spiritual eminence of Sankara on his brow. Lambent beams the light of Thought on his face. He is full of knowledge. Such is the acquisitive power of the meditative



mind, he knows everything—from the Imperial craft of British statesmanship to the travail agonies of Soviet Russia, from the scientific method of agriculture in modern Japan to the most trivial sartorial amenities of the day at Paris.

My Acharyaswami is always open and ready for philosophical discussion, and commands the speech of classic Sanscrit with ease and terseness. The afternoon is one intellectual combat with every variety of men, from the graduate fresh from the University to the orthodox pundit. He goes through the task, unwearied by ignorance and undismayed by talent, stating and restating the grand concept of the Oneness of Life and the goal of humanity. The conference goes on animated and lively, till the evening calls my Acharyaswami to the strength and calm of prayers and meditations, which take wellnigh over two hours. Then

he goes to sleep, composed and free, after a cup of milk and a few fruits.

But my Acharyaswami is at his very best while he journeys administering spiritual solace to the country people. Whenever he feels a call to go out to stir the religious consciousness and advance the power and blessings of the *pectam*, he moves out in his antique palanquin in utter stateliness and pomp, accompanied by horses, camels and elephants, and a large concourse of people with shops, sweetmeats and sundries. His Holiness is then a moving city and the talk and sight of the neighbourhood. He visits every sacred place and temple, and bathes in all the holy waters of the village. He evokes the religious zeal of the people, and ash-emblazoned orthodoxy, dressed in flawless Aryan style, is in full evidence around. At the bidding of my Acharyaswami, the miser willingly parts with his gold

and the spendthrift restrains himself for a day from the call of pleasure, and the village tank and the temple are conserved and improved. The village life is inspired with a true co-operative spirit.

The visit of my Acharyaswami is a godly event for every Indian village. It spells prosperity, at least for a quinquennium. Every one does his best to make the short stay of His Holiness a success. Everything else is forgotten. All activities, even agricultural, are suspended; and the whole village, men and women and children, are literally at his feet. All pay their tribute in coin and kind as they can afford. But there is a standard minimum. The recognised *pathakanikkai* (tribute at the feet) is one hundred and eight coins, gold or silver. For one hundred and eight is a weird number in Hindu ritual. It has a mysterious sanction and power.

From the chanting of the *gayatri* to the entertainment of the Acharyaswami, one hundred and eight is our standard number. There is yet a super-number—a thousand and eight. Its efficacy is even greater. Therefore the tribute of a rich man is a thousand and eight, which my Swami collects and spends promptly on sanitation and education.

My Acharyaswami belongs to the most ancient and selfless order of monks in the world. He is the holiest of Brahmanas, but transcends the distinctions of caste and creed. The poor and the panchama are as dear to his heart for social and economic reclamation. His temper and outlook are most democratic, though the ritual would seem exclusive. He is the rallying-point of Hinduism and the undying hope of its strength and purity in our darkest hour of need.

Wherever my Acharyaswami is, men, women and children gather

round him with home-feeling and adoration, and each sits with patience and watches with eager eye for his or her turn of the spoonful of *abhi-shekam* water that has dripped over God Chandramouliswer, to cure all ills of body and soul.

Wherever my Acharyaswami is, there you find burning steady and pure, the lamp of life and knowledge. He has surrendered everything at a tender age, youth, wealth and all the civic pleasures, for the service of man and the continuance of a mission. He is dear to us, even as the rolling sea is to the land-soiled air. Passionate and deep-rooted is our attachment for Sankara. He is our greatest birth and our Adi Jagath Guru.

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## SARASWATI'S MARRIAGE

SARASWATI is now a maiden of twelve tropic summers. She is a Brahmin girl, clear-faced and gentle-voiced and of noble birth. Being high and country-born, like the wild rose on the mountain ridge, she never lacked sunshine or air. She is the eye of her village and the sweetest girl in the neighbourhood. Even as the honey secreted in flower-cups calls forth the bee, Saraswati's beauty and riches have brought her many a bright lad. To her opulent parents, her marriage is of sleepless importance, and to the village it is a matter of general excitement. Her father has canvassed and scanned every horoscope worthy of her. But Destiny has not yet sent her her lord. Only fifteen days are left ere the

marriage season will close. And Saraswati is ripening quick to the anxious care of her orthodox mother..

Panchu—the full name is Panchapagesan, meaning the Lord of Five Rivers; the college has cut down his name to this affectionate diminutive—Panchu is a treble first class in B.A., and this is the final trophy of an academic career of crowded achievements. He is now a student-at-law, with visions of a judgeship. The stately pile of buildings of the High Court, which adjoins his classroom, has already ensnared his ambition. His heart throbs with the pulse of a great career. He had hoped to secure as his life-partner one among the plethora of daughters the leading vakils of his place had to their credit. But Fate drew a red-herring across the scent, and he missed the track which led to a life of assured ease and perchance of success. Still he

hoped for a proper alliance, and had to wait but a few months to nod gravely that "wiving goes by Destiny".

Panchu is now the candidate for the hand of Saraswati. But Sarasu's mother is a practical lady. She refuses to believe in the dreams and visions of judgeship. She prefers to rate Panchu at his present worth. She has always been in favour of some landed aristocrat of ancient pedigree, as a proper husband for her darling. In fact, her own cousin, the only heir to a hundred *velis* of land, keeps unmarried, waiting for the offer of Sarasu to him. Her mother insists on some background of wealth and scope for "darling Sarasu," to make whey and butter and never stint for firewood in the metropolis.

But Sarasu's father is not to be put off so easily. He has heard from his grandmother the humble beginnings of Judge Muthusami whose marble



presented in a general way to all except her lord. Panchu should not be present on this occasion. He is supposed to go to sleep early, so that he may rise early for the elaborate ceremonies the next day. But sleep Panchu could not and did not, in that strange tumble and reassessment of life. He dreamed.

Friday, the next morning, is freer and calmer. Panchu, eager and pious, goes through certain initial ceremonies. The auspicious *lagna* is nearing. Sarasu is dressed in her prettiest *sari*, and within, her nature feels the swell of a change. The marriage begins with the preparatory *paradhesam*, where Panchu walks up and down the open street, a proud lad, playing the part of a *vedic* Brahmacharya to whom the offer of a maiden is made and accepted. Then the "casually acquired" son-in-law is conducted to the bride's house and they are presented to

each other in quite an impressive way. Panchu and Sarasu, lifted on the broad shoulders of their respective maternal uncles, or on a borrowed uncle, broad-shouldered for the occasion, greet each other for the first time with glances of undying memory, and exchange garlands thrice, murmuring to themselves marriage vows sweeter than song.

Our marriage is a feast of ritual, and the *mantras* tell in resonant Sanskrit an impressive story of love-making. Already the courtyard is full of men and women, boys, girls and children, crying for marriage sweetmeats. Presentation being over, their hands locked in one another's, Panchu and Sarasu are led to a central place in the courtyard. Their first duty is to kindle the *homam agni* or sacred fire in consecration of their wedlock. The necessities for this elaborate ritual are kept ready by the family

priest. The *sastris* and the *vaidic* men have gathered round it to offer their prayers and blessings and meekly wait for the silver in return. The friends and relations, dressed in their best, are grouped and seated together in knots, on carpeted verandahs and halls. Not far away, stand in nonchalant ease the prettiest girls of the village, whispering together in rippling laughter and taking strategic surveys of the strength and spoils of the opposite camp.

Meanwhile Panchu is all tenderness and Sarasu all emotion. It is a vivid group. The *sastris* are there in number, vacantly chanting the *mantras* by rote, and within struggling to assess their prospective reward for all their vocal labour and to catch the busy eye of the host with one familiar twinkle. Sarasu feels a deep inner rapture. Fed by ghee and the dried *arasam* twigs, the *Homam Agni* breaks

forth in tongues of flame and pours out a dense column of smoke. But more suffocating are the droning voice and the scattered mind of the officiating priest, who is chanting the sacred *mantram* with a vernacular variation every now and then for some more money for his pontifical fee. But Panchu is in no mood for banter.

Now, the *Sankalpam*, which names the day and the constellation and locates the place of the marriage and defines the object of the gathering, is over. The Indian pipe, or the *Nayanam*, fills the air with cascades of music and the drum drowns the loitering voice of the mere conversationalist. The sacramental part of the ceremony is now reached and Panchu is quite earnest. A string of cotton thread, yellowed in saffron, holds together handsome gold plates curiously engraved with simple line symbols of marriage vows. This is

known as *Tirumangalyam*, or the "Emblem of Sweet Concord". Panchu eagerly takes this in his hand, and in an atmosphere vibrant with elated music and emotion, throws it round the neck of Saraswati and quickly wheels her thrice round the *Homam Agni*, after touching seven times, with the humility of the true lover, the feet of Sarasu, which are placed for the purpose on a piece of granite, symbolising their steadfast allegiance to each other through sunshine and storm. This function is called the *saptapadi*, which sets the seal on marriage and makes it irrevocable. Panchu claims Sarasu as his for ever. The religious portion of the marriage is over, with a few more *mantras* of a general nature, indicating the duties and responsibilities of married life.

Our marriage lasts for four days, with the parting on the fifth. On the second and the successive days it is

practically a social gathering with an interlude of a religious ceremony in order to keep alive the *Homam Agni* both at sunrise and sunset, which incidentally gives greater scope to Sarasu and Panchu to know each other better and even whisper a word or two. Otherwise it is all one round of feasting, varied in the evenings by an interesting function got up by married girls for the initiation of the raw pair. Sarasu and Panchu are called upon for *Nalangu*, where each softly touches the other on the pretext of smearing sandal-paste or turmeric, or offering betels. The afternoons are generally spent in music parties and Harikathas got up in honour of the marriage. After sunset on the fourth day, which always seems busier than the other days, the married couple are taken along in flower-decorated palanquins in processional round through the streets of the village. All are

afoot, cheering the "sleepy" couple and yet keeping vigil that they do not talk to each other. Sarasu and Panchu are wearied of the strenuous four days. Panchu accepts with mingled feelings the hearty, half-religious, half-secular send-off on the fifth day. Sarasu is not to follow her lord according to orthodox custom. Panchu, even in these four days, has grown to reverence the wisdom of the Hindu usage, which delays a month ere kindling once again in Sarasu's home, the *Homan Agni* with *arasam* twigs, till it leaps into tongues of flame over the ripening features of Sarasu.

Our marriage ceremony is an idyll in our life, of unforgettable memory and shrewd psychology. Its impressive ritual is inlaid with meaning, and serves to smooth the rugged course of love. Its social functions, by their very spirit of saintly moderation, temper and educate the young, who marry

first and then begin to love. The course of ascent is laid with knowledge and caution, and the parental hand guides the married couple through. Our marriage system is the most ancient and treasured of our many legacies from the Rishis. It is the one thing which has least felt the change and impact of Time. We preserve it with a religiousness we do not own to our own gods. We celebrate it with an opulence and care we do not bestow even on our dearest in life. We record its triumphs with a joy which no other victory gives us.

Kind reader, pray with me: May it prosper long!





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